Chapter Five
Jail Capacity Forecasts

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Forecasting future jail population sizes is, or should be, a policy-based task. The changes that have occurred in United States' jail populations during the last twenty-five years provide considerable evidence that shifts in local policies can bring about dramatic increases or decreases in jail populations within a county. Few planners who did jail population forecasts during the 1970s or 1980s were able to foresee the nation-wide policy-shift trends that would lead to dramatic growth in jail populations in the 1980s and 1990s. They were unable to foresee, for example, the greater focus on persons convicted of drunk driving. In the 1990s, the offense that impacted most jails in the United States was domestic violence.

Because of this failure of foresight, even those counties that built new jails during the latter half of the 1980s found that space that was supposed to be sufficient until the year 2000 was filled by the early 1990s. In many cases, the decision-makers responsible for the policy shifts at issue had been on hand when the forecasting studies were done; they were no more able than the forecasters to predict where policy emphases would fall during the coming decade.

Too much jail forecasting work done in recent years has assumed that criminal justice system policies in a county will remain the same over the forecast period. In reality, that is rarely the case. When forecasters make their predictions based on the assumption that county decision-makers will make no changes in criminal justice system policy, they doom their predictions to failure. No county criminal justice system today can afford not to *anticipate*

change. For better or for worse, all county systems will have to change, with increasing frequency, in the years to come. The question is not *whether* but *how* a particular set of policies can be expected to change. Jail forecasters must learn to take the likelihood of such changes into account and try to foresee the various possibilities. As the drunk-driving and domestic violence examples illustrate, forecasters cannot do this without the close cooperation of county decision-makers. Ultimately, the decision-makers are the ones who must decide where the emphasis will fall in the years to come.

Jail capacity forecasts must depend in large part on information made available to forecasters by a county. The forecasts contained in this report are no exception. Much historical information exists on the way the Gallatin County Jail has been used during the past 15 years. Jail admissions, average length of stay, and average daily population figures are available from 1989 to the present (the 2003 data is annualized based upon the first 10 months).

Attempts to obtain older data, however, proved impossible — the records simply do not exist or are not reliable. An estimate of the forecast of county population was received from the Gallatin County Planning Department, taken from the Woods and Poole study to the year 2025.

As useful as these numbers may be in constructing a picture of what is to come, they will not aid the county unless a consensus regarding criminal justice system policy for the next twenty years is reached. The text, tables, and graphs that follow illustrate several possible population scenarios, scenarios that suggest what the county might expect in terms of jail bed demand given several possible policy scenarios. No one-policy scenario is the "right" scenario. It will be up to the county decision-makers to select the view of the

future that best represents what they believe to be the most likely direction of county decision-makers, and then plan for jail space on that basis.

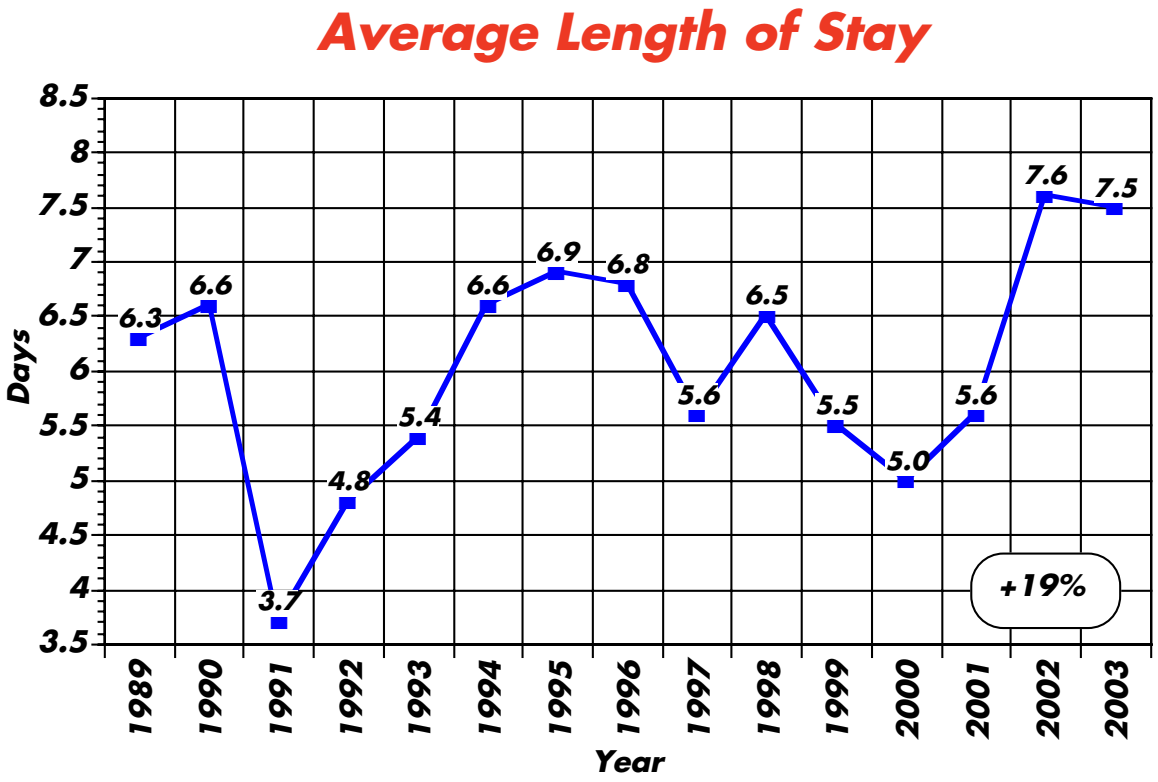
A. Admissions

The first graphic presents the total admissions per year for the years 1989 to 2003.

In 1989, the Gallatin County Jail admitted a total of 1,634 persons. In 2002, there were 2,913 bookings. If the rest of 2003 continues as the first ten months have, there will be 2,981 bookings, a change of 82 percent over the study period.

B. Average Length of Stay

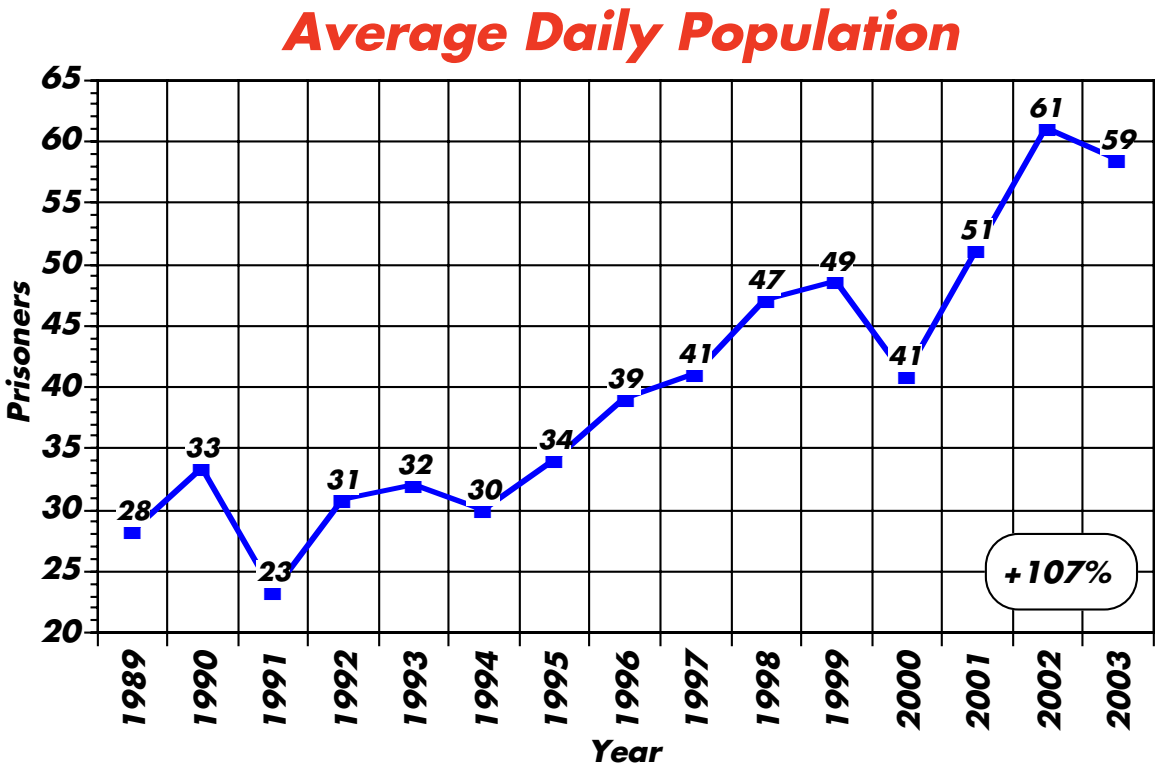
The next graphic shows the average length of stay for 1989 to 2003.



The average length of stay in 1989 was 6.3 days. The average length of stay in 2002 was 7.6 days. For the first 10 months of 2003, the average length of stay was 7.5, days making for a 19 percent decrease over the period.

C. Average Daily Population

The next graphic presents the historic average daily populations (ADP) for the Gallatin County Jail over the period 1989 to 2003.

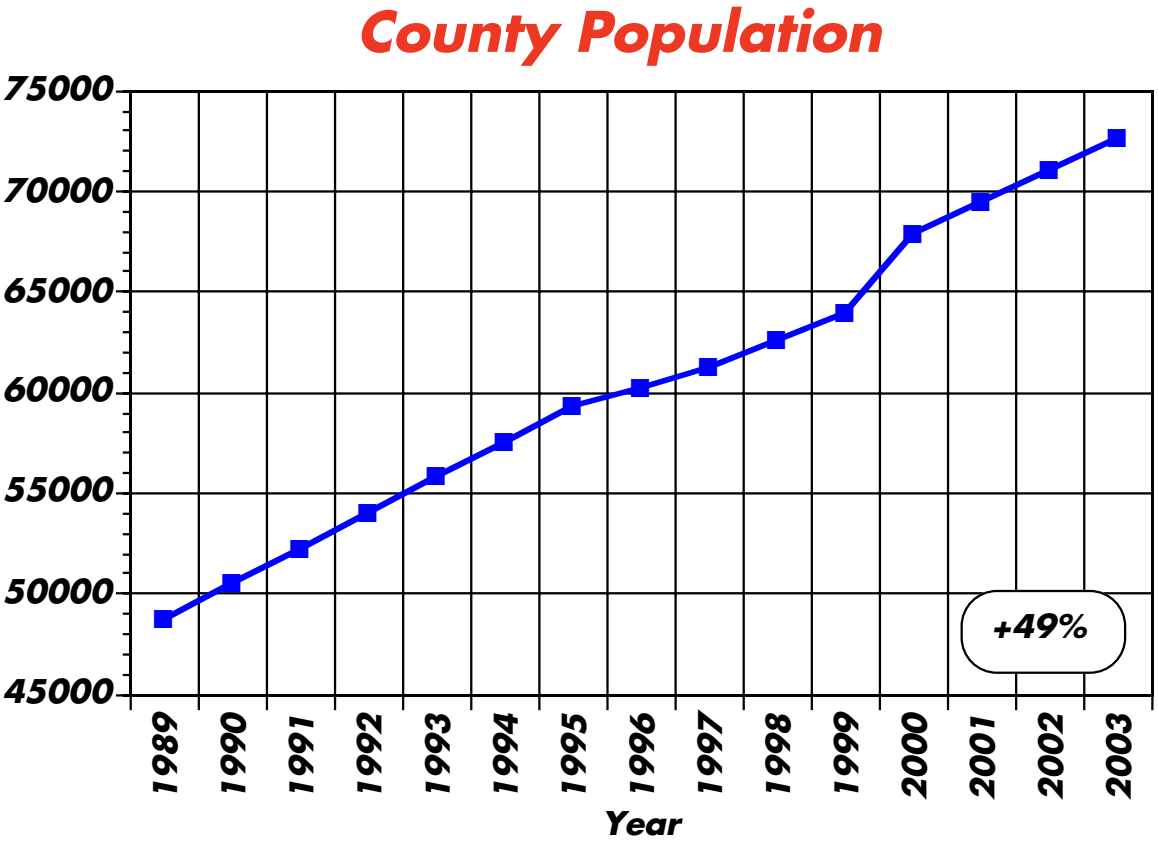


The average daily population was 28 in 1989. The ADP moved within a narrow range until 1994 when the population was 30. It has risen steadily since that time, except for a slight drop in 2000. The 2002 average daily population was 61. For the first 10 months of 2003, the average daily population was 59, making for a 107 percent increase over the period.

D. County Population: Actual and Forecasted — 1989-2025

1. County Population: Actual — 1989-2002

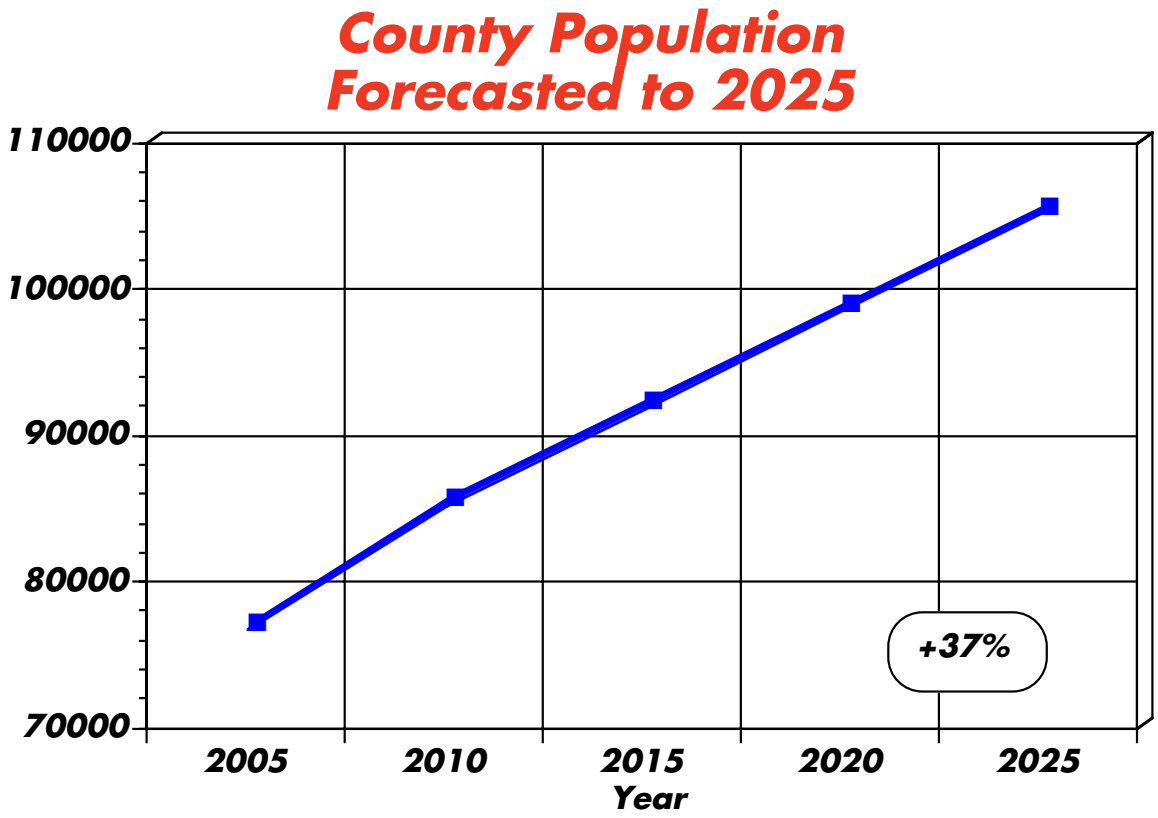
The next graphic shows the actual county population for each year between 1989 and 2003.



In 1989, 48,701 persons resided in the county. Since then, the population has risen steadily and it is estimated that 72,604 persons live in the county in 2003, a 49 percent increase over the period.

2. County Population: Forecasted — 2005-2025

The next graphic shows the forecasted county population from 2005 to 2025 as provided by the state of Montana.

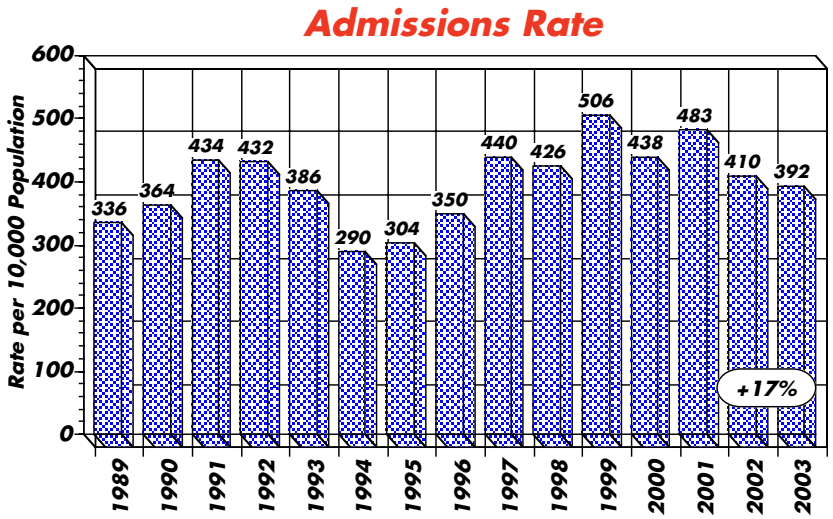


The county population in 2005 is expected to be 76,530. Population is expected to grow to 105,000 by 2025, a 37 percent increase.

E. Rates

1. Admissions

The next graphic shows the rate of admissions to the Gallatin County Jail per 10,000 persons from 1989 to 2003.

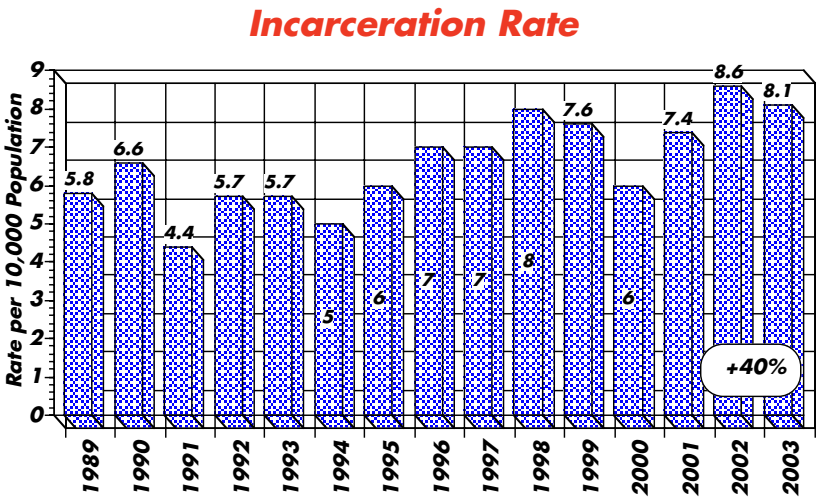


In 1989, the admission rate into the Gallatin County Jail was 336 per 10,000 population; by 2003, the rate had increased to 392 per 10,000 population, a 17 percent increase.

2. Incarceration

a. Gallatin County

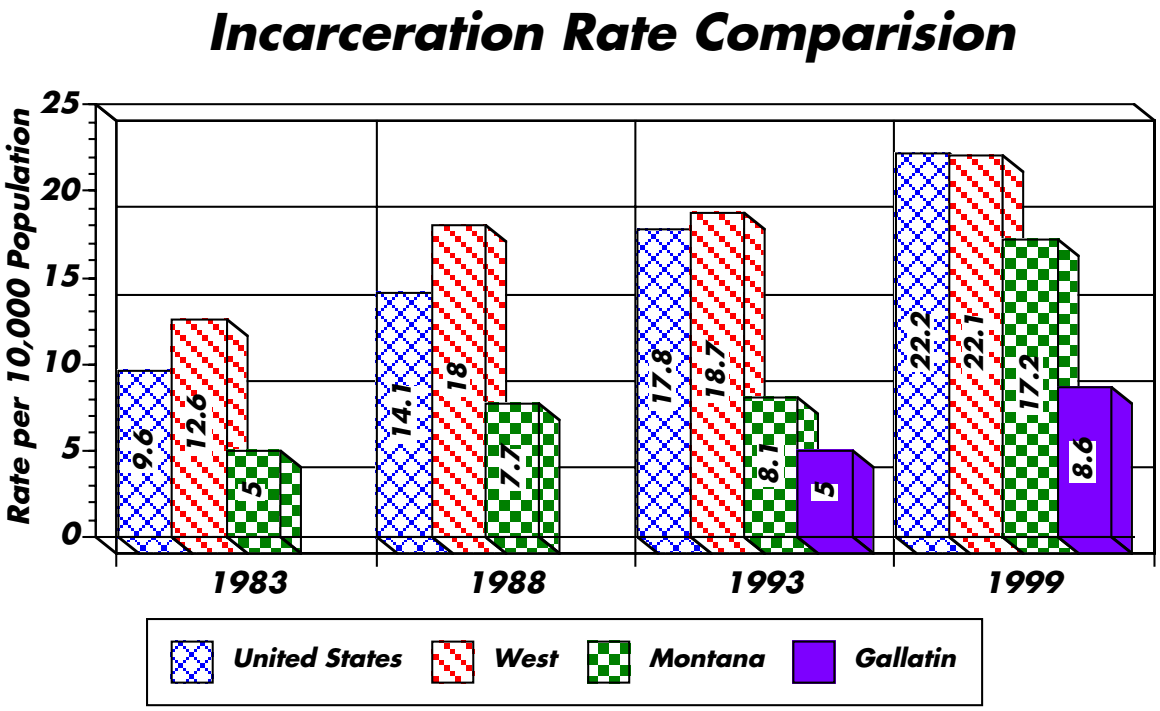
The incarceration rate per 10,000 of the population is shown in the graphic below for the years 1989 to 2003.



The incarceration rate rose from 5.8 per 10,000 population in 1989 to 8.1 per 10,000 population in 2003, a 40 percent increase.

b. United States

The next graphic shows the incarceration rates for the United States, Western United States, State of Montana, and Gallatin County for the years 1983, 1988, 1993, and 1999. Gallatin County data is only available in 1993 and 1999. The national and state data is taken from the Census of Jails from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Unfortunately, the national data is only collected every 5 or 6 years and there has been a substantial change in the Gallatin County jail population since the last census.



In 1983, the incarceration rate nationally was 9.6 per 10,000 population as compared with 12.6 for the Western United States, 5 for the state of Montana. The last year that there is national data available is 1999 when the national rate was 22.2 per 10,000 population as compared with 22.1 for the West, 17.2 for the state of Montana, and 8.6 for Gallatin County.

F. Jail Capacity Forecasts

1. Introduction

A simple method of forecasting the number of jail beds needed would be to use average daily population increases over the 15-year study period as a predictive base. The jail population increased by 2.2 persons per year during that 15 year period. Using the above method, one might predict that approximately 103 jail beds would need to be constructed for the year 2025. However, this forecast assumes that the jail is being appropriately utilized today (that no additional pre- or post trial intermediate sanctions exist that could impact the jail population and that all persons who should be booked or sentenced to jail have been coming to jail) and that the jail will continue to be used at the same rate over the next 22 years as it has been over the past 15 years. Neither of these assumptions is likely to be true. However, a more detailed approach is recommended to be used to develop jail population forecasts — one in which county officials can help select specific scenarios for the future on which such forecasts can be based.

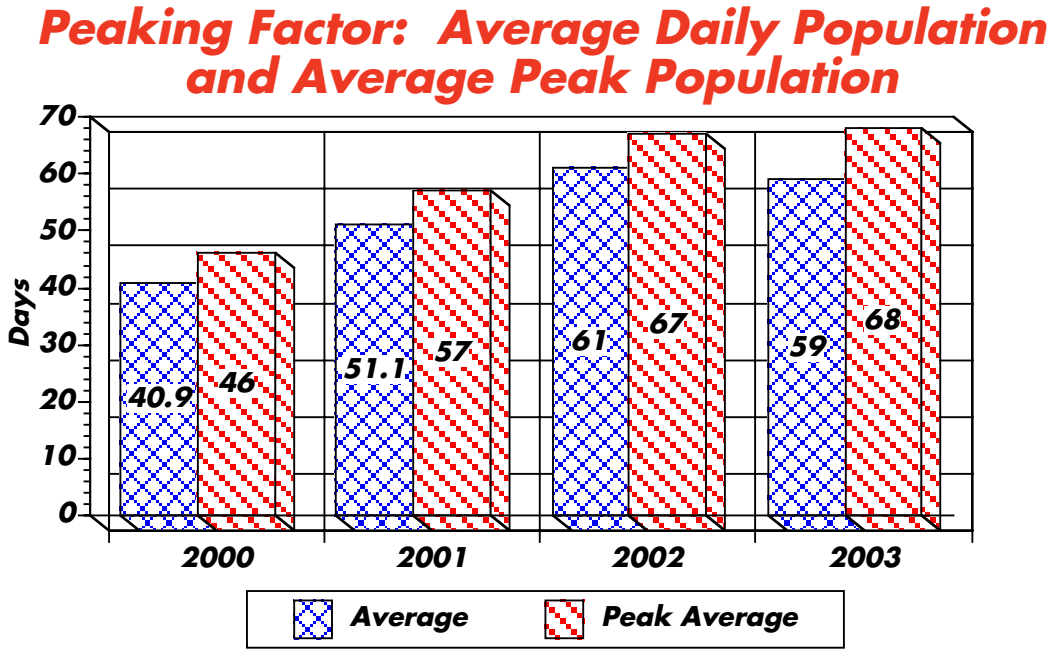
The factors driving the increasing jail population in Gallatin County have been a significant increase in admissions and a moderate increase in the average length of stay. The average length of stay over the last 15 years was 6 days; and over the last 5 years, the average length of stay was 6.2 days. For the purposes of these forecasts, three estimated average lengths of stay have been used for the year 2025: 8, 10, and 12 days. The admissions rates averaged 399 per 10,000 population over the last 15 years and 446 over the last five years. For the first ten months of 2003, the admissions rate has been 392. Three different admissions rates are used for these forecasts: 400, 450, and 500.

2. Adjustments: Peaking and Classification Factors

The expected average daily population for each of the forecast scenarios does *not* mean that the county should have this amount of beds available. Since these are daily averages, the county's plans should include allowances for those days (in a given year) when the population surges above the average because of normal fluctuations in admissions and releases.

This situation is similar to a storm drain system. A storm drain sits empty most of the year; however, it needs to be large enough to handle the peak runoff from a summer thundershower or melting snow from the mountains. Jail populations are very similar. During peak periods — traditionally weekends, the end of the month, and the summer months — jail populations climb. A jail needs to be large enough to handle the peak periods.

The next graphic shows the peaking factor for Gallatin County. The jail provided the three highest population days each month for each of the years 2000, 2001, and 2002 and for the first 6 months of 2003.



Each month's average peak population was determined and then compared with the average daily population to develop the peaking factor. Due to increased pressures on the jail population, this data illustrates the interventions made by the Sheriff's administration to control the peak populations. The three-year average was 12.8 percent, which was rounded up to 13 percent for the forecasts.

A second factor, classification, was used to allow for the daily need, in any jail, to have a few open beds available for new inmates within *each* classification category. In a jail of this size, an appropriate classification adjustment factor would be two beds for each of the seven primary classification categories. That is, the county should increase its estimate for each year by 14 beds to come to a final figure of what will be needed for each of the years in this planning cycle.

3. The Forecasts for 2025

The next set of graphics gives figures for the year 2025 based on an average length of stay of 8 days, 10 days, and 12 days.

The tables below show (1) the average daily population, (2) beds necessary to handle peak periods, and (3) beds necessary for classification purposes. These figures are given for each of the three possible admissions rates. Each table then gives the incarceration rate per 10,000 population for each of the three possible admissions rates. It should be emphasized that the incarceration rate is only used for comparison purposes. The forecasts are *not* developed based upon suggested incarceration rates.

By 2025, it is estimated that 105,000 persons will be living in the county; this figure provides the baseline for the tables. It should be noted that on the day of the Symposium, a new population forecast was revealed showing that

the county population could actually increase to 114,000 by the year 2025. After a discussion with county officials, it was decided to use the earlier forecast of 105,000.

Year 2025
Average Length of Stay of 8 Days

Admissions Rate per 10,000 Population	Average Daily Population	Total Beds Necessary for the Peak Populations	Total Beds Necessary for Classification	Incarceration Rate per 100,000 Population
400	92	104	118	9
450	104	117	131	10
500	115	130	144	11

Average Length of Stay of 10 Days

Admissions Rate per 10,000 Population	Average Daily Population	Total Beds Necessary for the Peak Populations	Total Beds Necessary for Classification	Incarceration Rate per 100,000 Population
400	115	130	144	11
450	129	146	160	12
500	144	163	177	14

Average Length of Stay of 12 Days

Admissions Rate per 10,000 Population	Average Daily Population	Total Beds Necessary for the Peak Populations	Total Beds Necessary for Classification	Incarceration Rate per 100,000 Population
400	138	156	170	13
450	155	176	190	15
500	173	195	209	16

G. Conclusion

The forecasts presented in this report are just starting points. The projections are, at best, estimates of what is likely to occur in the coming twenty years. Should the county decision-makers wish to alter any of the scenarios, they can do so by adjusting the key indices of jail use — county population, admissions rate, expected average lengths of stay, the peaking factor, and the classification factor. By adjusting these factors, the decision-makers will obtain different estimates of the required number of jail beds.

There is no guarantee that criminal justice system policy will not change and push jail populations higher or lower than these numbers indicate. The forecasters of the 1980s did not foresee the dramatic rise in jail populations that took place during the 1990s. No one was able to estimate those changes accurately.

Gallatin County officials must analyze the data contained in this report and adopt a plan for the future of their criminal justice system. Policy shifts that could change the amount of jail space available are detailed in this report. If the necessary changes recommended in this report do *not* occur, then *more* beds than those predicted in this report will be necessary. Left uncontrolled, the present jail population will continue to grow, filling and overfilling whatever facilities are constructed in response to such growth, and leaving Gallatin County with *no* alternatives for managing the jail population other than simply building new facilities every few years in response to renewed overcrowding. An approach that emphasizes active management, on the other hand, may make it possible to prolong the sufficiency of *new* jail space for a *longer* period — giving Gallatin County time to explore and try out the many

viable alternatives to construction that have become available in recent years and that are recommended in the next chapter.

The absolute minimum forecast that should be accepted is the scenario shown below.

Year 2025
Average Length of Stay of 8 Days

Admissions Rate per 10,000 Population	Average Daily Population	Total Beds Necessary for the Peak Populations	Total Beds Necessary for Classification	Incarceration Rate per 10,000 Population
450	104	117	131	10

While it is unlikely that this forecast will meet the demand for jail space in the year 2025, it is a goal to strive toward. After all, while Gallatin County is committed to developing the most efficient criminal justice system possible with the proper array of alternative programs, this number of beds will result in a county incarceration rate in 2025 of just over *half* the *1999* state of Montana average.

- A forecast that would roughly maintain today's average length of stay but reflects the upward trend in the admissions rate, yields a projected need of 144 jail beds by 2025.
- A forecast that would factor in moderate growth in the average length of stay, and reflect the upward trend in the admissions rate, yields a projected need of 177 jail beds by 2025.

I recommend taking as a target, the mid-point between these two forecasts, and designing a jail that can expand to meet a *160-bed* need in 2025. In any event, a 131-bed jail represents the absolute minimum size facility that should be planned.

In the planning for a 131-bed jail, consideration could be given to incorporating a minimum-security unit that can function as a work release facility. A Work Release program can help conserve jail beds by providing an alternative sentence for low risk offenders, and by making another sanction option available.

Building a jail with a work release unit presents the system with a challenge: to utilize viable alternatives to incarceration to forestall the need for 160 or more beds. For only through the creative use of alternatives, coupled with efforts to make the system more efficient, will the County be able to prolong the sufficiency of 131 beds.

The success of the endeavors over the next couple of years in effecting changes in the criminal justice process, and in implementing intermediate punishment sanctions, will determine if and when the jail will need to expand beyond 131 beds. This is the challenge.

It is also a good starting point for phasing in additional housing units as needed. The site can be master planned for a number of beds towards the high end of the forecasts along with construction of the necessary infrastructure, but only build the first phase. This phase will allow the county the proper spaces to classify prisoners along with a proper intake area for newly arrested defendants. The success of the work made over the next couple of years in implementing changes in the criminal justice process, and in implementing the intermediate punishment sanctions recommended in the next chapter, will determine if and when additional housing units will need to be constructed.